

# 37<sup>th</sup> District Legislative News

## Rep. Kip Tokuda

### Committees:

- Children & Family Services  
– *Ranking Minority Member*
- Appropriations

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Dear Friends and Neighbors:

As the 1998 legislative session gets underway, Washington has an opportunity to become an even greater state. We are blessed with thriving high-tech, biomedical, and aerospace industries, which are fueling an economic boom. We have a healthy revenue surplus. For many, the quality of life in the Northwest ranks among the best.

But we must recognize that not all are sharing in this prosperity. It's everyday people who work hard to make Washington state's economy strong. These same working families deserve a brighter future for their families and their communities.

During the 1998 legislative session, I'll fight for a stronger commitment to education, for tax relief for working families, for affordable health care and for economic opportunity for all. And I'll continue to protect our most vulnerable populations, including our children.

This year is a short session of 60 days, which means legislation will be moving swiftly. If you have any concerns or input for this session, please feel free to contact me or my legislative assistant, Diana Sheythe. I wish you a Happy New Year for 1998.

Regards,

Rep. Kip Tokuda

## Children and Schools

Even amid our state's economic prosperity, funding for schools continues to decline, losing to inflation. We are spending \$261 less per student since 1993 (adjusted for inflation). That's \$7,500 less for an average classroom! Meanwhile, the recent 4th-grade test scores clearly demonstrate the need for increased investments to help all children achieve higher academic standards.

The trend toward decreasing support for education must be reversed. I applaud Governor Locke's recent proposal calling for a volunteer reading corps. The Governor is proposing a \$28 million volunteer tutoring program, which would use 25,000 volunteers to work with 82,000 children in second to fifth grade.

I also believe we must reduce class size. Washington's classrooms are among the most crowded in the nation. Only three states have more crowded classrooms! I also support legislation which would: 1) provide full-day kindergarten, 2) fund the critical extra time students need to meet the new standards, including tutorials or after-school academies and 3) train classroom teachers to take full advantage of new technology.

## Liveable Wages for Working Families

I support raising Washington's minimum wage to \$6.50 an hour by 2001. This would enable a family of three with one adult working full-time at minimum wage to rise above the poverty level for the first time in several years. In Oregon, an average entry wage of \$6.57 for welfare recipients, is moving them off the welfare rolls quickly. In contrast, Washington's minimum wage is the lowest on the West Coast.

I also advocate emergency and family leave for workers, so they can take their children to the doctor or attend school conferences without fear of losing their jobs. This could be done easily if the state used its unemployment trust fund to cover such expenses. I will support legislation which proposes to do exactly that.



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## Welfare Transition

As welfare reform gets underway, we are in the initial stages of moving tens of thousands of welfare recipients into jobs. This creates several administrative challenges.

Through this implementation process, I am advocating for local flexibility. We must be more flexible with program requirements if we are to place and retain welfare recipients in liveable wage jobs and be responsive to the needs of employers.

I am also concerned about non-English speaking populations who lack sufficient language abilities to get a job. I support incorporating English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction into job training programs for these recipients. If we are to successfully implement welfare reform, we must do so humanely and effectively.

## Crime Prevention

Last session, lawmakers passed the most comprehensive juvenile justice reform in 20 years. This year, Democrats call for a continuation of that bipartisan spirit to fill the remaining gaps in public safety, including stronger prevention of juvenile crime.

I will sponsor legislation to dedicate more funding to prevention of juvenile crime. The need is great. Juvenile crime is rising, with predictions of even higher crime rates as the number of juveniles grows in future years. We must stop this trend by investing in at-risk children and teens, through prevention that reaches them and their families early. We can't afford not to. Prevention saves money. One study estimates that every child diverted from a life of crime saves \$1.5 million in taxpayer dollars.

Prevention efforts can range from early in-home counseling to after-school programs. Since the peak hour for violent juvenile crime is the hour after school ends, quality after-school programs make sense.

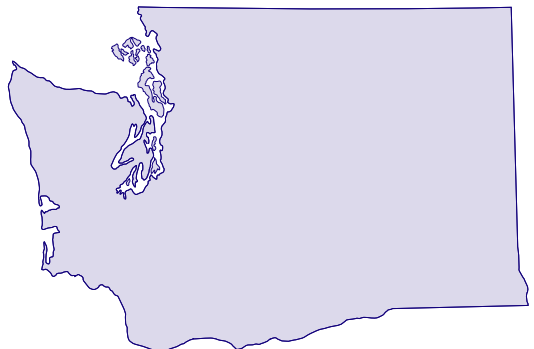
I also support giving judges more power to deal with mentally-ill offenders. And, I'll work to institute new safeguards in group homes, to prevent escapes from juveniles who are not ready to be released.

## Health Care:

Almost 700,000 people in Washington are uninsured, including 130,000 children. Most of these people (over 70%) are working. They simply can't afford health insurance. That's why Washington created the Basic Health Plan. When implemented in 1993, it was a national model for providing low-cost insurance for working people. But now the program is floundering, under misguided policies set by the majority party. Premiums have risen so high, that the working poor simply can't afford the program. We must hold the majority party to its promise of insuring 200,000 people through the BHP.

I believe family planning services should be made available to all low-income families to prevent unintended pregnancies, which comprise almost 60% of all pregnancies. Over 30% of these end in abortion and the cost, both in human terms and to the state, is staggering. Rising child abuse is another unfortunate consequence. A significant number of unintended pregnancies could be prevented, if more insurance plans covered contraceptives. In Washington, almost 75% of insurance plans do not cover contraceptives in their prescription drug coverage. Many insurance plans offer sterilization as the only family-planning benefit.

I also believe that insurance companies that cover hospital care should include maternity care so that women are not forced to turn to the state for this service. I will continue to support legislation which strengthens health care for women and families.



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